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## DOCUMENTS

### A PICTURE OF THE FIRST UNITED STATES ARMY: THE JOURNAL OF CAPTAIN SAMUEL NEWMAN

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY MILO M. QUAIFE

During the early summer of 1789 the new national government of the United States fluttered feebly into being. Among the numerous problems which it inherited from its predecessor none was more pressing than the protection of its citizens on the Ohio frontier, and the ending of the Indian outrages in that region. Thus, coincident with its birth, the new government confronted a warlike situation. For the waging of war we were as little prepared as we were in 1898 or in 1917. As in 1917, too, the American government and people were extremely reluctant to engage in war at all. Not unlike the conduct of Imperial Germany in recent years was that of the northwestern Indian tribes toward us a century and a quarter ago. And with like results was it attended, for, after repeated efforts to avert the necessity therefor, the government in 1790 took measures for the creation of an army for the chastisement of the tribes who were slaughtering its citizens on the frontier.

When this decision was reached the military force of the United States consisted of one regiment of three hundred or four hundred men, garrisoning the several posts on the Ohio River. Its ranks were to be filled by recruits drawn "from Maryland to New York"; while a second regiment was authorized, all but two companies of which were to be recruited in New England. For the rest, enough militiamen and six-months' levies were to be enrolled to bring the total to three thousand men. Governor Arthur St. Clair, a veteran of the Revolution, was appointed major general in charge of the entire military force, and to him instructions were given out-

lining a plan of campaign which, it was expected, would bring peace to the troubled frontier. Briefly stated, he was to proceed from Cincinnati to the site of modern Fort Wayne, in the heart of the hostile country, and there establish a permanent garrison of size sufficient not merely to ensure its own safety but to provide also an expeditionary force of several hundred men available for use as the occasion should arise.

The motives of the American government were liberal and humane, and the plan of campaign laid down left nothing to be desired. Its execution, however, was conducted with as much folly and inefficiency as could well have been displayed in connection with a single military campaign. History does not repeat itself in the sense that precise situations and movements are ever reproduced; but broadly considered, in perusing the history of our first national war, the citizen of the United States acquainted with the events of the last four years encounters much that is strangely familiar. The pacifists who oppose all military measures, those who would subdue mad beasts or raging men by the sweet arts of moral suasion, did not originate in 1914. Woodrow Wilson's administration was not the first to manifest toward a hostile and belligerent people an attitude of patient forbearance and lofty idealism; nor the first to make the painful discovery that in the end the policy of moral suasion must be backed by bayonets. Nor, finally, is the present war the first into which the American nation has entered unprepared, entailing thereby a far greater expenditure of blood and treasure than would otherwise have been required.

In the end we won our first war, of course, as, please God, we shall win in our present struggle. Despite early unreadiness and inefficiency, a nation of three million prosperous Americans finally worsted a few thousand half naked savages. But to accomplish the task involved five years of time, the dispatch of three successive armies and many minor expeditions, the destruction of hundreds of American citizens,

soldiers and civilians alike. The greatest disaster to the whites and triumph of the Indians occurred in the overthrow of St. Clair's army in 1791. Probably there is no more depressing chapter in American military history than the story of this campaign. To tell it here is not our purpose, but merely to introduce the story of one who took part in it. Captain Newman's journal affords but a partial view of the campaign,<sup>1</sup> but it presents a rare, if humiliating, picture of life in the first United States Army. Much water has passed under the bridge since 1791 and the American Army today is vastly better as well as larger than that which St. Clair led to destruction in the time of our national infancy. We are entitled to take such pride in this improvement as the facts may justify, yet in the opinion of the Nation's greatest living military leader, at the outbreak of war a year ago, our Army was as little fitted to meet its great adversary as was the army of St. Clair to meet the northwestern tribesmen.

The plan of the government contemplated that St. Clair should have three thousand effective troops assembled at Cincinnati by July 10, 1791. Delays of all kinds ensued, however, so that not until October could he count two thousand men. Thus the possibility of carrying out the campaign this year as planned was effectually obviated, even had St. Clair's force constituted a real army. From the General down, however, the whole force was so ill-equipped for the work in hand that it was a ghastly blunder even to essay an advance into the Indian country. Competent judges, such as General Har-mar, fully aware of this, foretold with confidence the consequences of such an advance. Notwithstanding, St. Clair's instructions were explicit, and early in the autumn he led his army out from the vicinity of Fort Washington on the painful march which terminated in its destruction. The journal we print is drawn from the rich stores of the Draper Col-

<sup>1</sup>The comprehensive story of St. Clair's campaign may be read in Roosevelt, *Winning of the West*, vol. IV, or in Archer B. Hulbert's *Military Roads of the Mississippi Basin*. A briefer narrative of it may be found in the present editor's *Chicago and the Old Northwest*, chap. V.

lection in the Wisconsin Historical Library. The author, Captain Newman of Boston, had served as ensign and lieutenant in the Revolutionary War. Apparently he gave ear to the call of his country when in 1790 New England was asked to supply the bulk of the newly-authorized Second United States Regiment. He became a captain and in this capacity led his company from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh and thence down the Ohio to the general rendezvous at Cincinnati. The journal covers this journey and the further northward advance of St. Clair's army until the termination of the record on October 23. Twelve days later the diarist was slain, as were most of his companions, in the defeat of November fourth.

The fact that the journal was discontinued on October 23, and the further one that unlike its author it escaped destruction in the wilderness are probably due to the situation explained in the entry for October 22. Preparatory to continuing the advance from Fort Jefferson Captain Newman packed and left behind his personal baggage except such as he could carry in a knapsack. Under such circumstances it seems likely he concluded to dispense with the further keeping of a journal.

In closing one final fact may be noted. St. Clair's little force comprised two regiments of regulars, two of six-months' levies, and a body of Kentucky militia. About the only semblance of soldierly discipline in the entire army was that maintained by the regulars. The picture which Newman presents, therefore, describes not the worst elements of the army but its choicest troops. It confirms with painful completeness the judgment of a contemporary observer that "men who are to be purchased from prisons, wheelbarrows, and brothels at two dollars a month" would not answer for fighting Indians.